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# THE IMPRESS OF PERSONALITY IN UNWRITTEN MUSIC

By PERCY GRAINGER

## EXTREMES ATTRACT

IT seems to me a very hopeful sign that the present widespread interest in unwritten music (be it European or Afro-American folk-songs and dances or native music from any quarter of the globe) apparently does not emanate from any reaction against the latest iconoclastic developments of our written art-music, but that, on the contrary, it is mainly in the ranks of the most highly cultured musicians (men whose depth of heart and brain makes them equally capable of appreciating the glorious creations of the great classics and the no less thrilling achievements of the most extreme modernists of to-day) that we meet with the keenest interest in this "back to the land" movement. Among those who have recently devoted themselves most ardently to the labor of actually collecting so-called "primitive" music of various kinds or in whose creative work direct or indirect contact with it has proved the most fruitful we find the names of such advanced composers as Stravinsky, Debussy, Ravel, Albeniz, Granados, Cyril Scott, Vaughan Williams, Balfour Gardiner and Ferruccio Busoni, while the great Frederick Delius (to my mind perhaps *the* rarest and most precious musical genius of our age) owes the fact of his becoming a composer at all to the inspiration he received from hearing Negro workers sing on his father's plantation in Florida, which determined him to give up a commercial career in order to study music in Leipzig; a debt to unwritten music that he has fittingly repayed by basing three of his loveliest works on themes of "primitive" origin: "Appalachia," on a Negro-American tune, "Brigg Fair" on the English peasant song of that name from my collection, and his recent "On hearing the first cuckoo in spring" on the Norwegian "I Ola Dalom" (published in Grieg's Op. 66).

In an essay in "The North American Review" for February, 1913, full of insight and rare understanding, by that champion of Russian and other modern music, Mr. Kurt Schindler, on "Boris Godounoff; and the life of Moussorgsky," we read how incalculably much the inspired art of that composer owed to close contact with both the life and the music of Russian peasants.

PRIMITIVE MUSIC IS TOO COMPLEX FOR  
UNTRAINED MODERN EARS

While so many of the greatest musical geniuses listen spell-bound to the unconscious, effortless musical utterances of primitive man, the general educated public, on the other hand, though willing enough to applaud adaptations of folk-songs by popular composers, shows little or no appreciation of such art in its unembellished original state, when, indeed, it generally is far too complex (as regards rhythm, dynamics, and scales) to appeal to listeners whose ears have not been subjected to the ultra-refining influence of close association with the subtle developments of our latest Western art-music.

The case of Grieg is typical. For over thirty years his popularity has been almost universally accredited to "national" traits supposed to have been drawn by him from Norwegian folk-songs; but few indeed, at home or abroad, can have taken the trouble to study these elements in their native purity, or they would have discovered for themselves what has been left to Grieg's greatest and most sympathetic biographer, Mr. Henry T. Finck, to point out often and ably: how much more the Norwegian genius owed the unique originality of his music to the strength of his own purely personal inventiveness than to any particular external or "national" source whatever. They would also have been in a position to more fully realize the generosity with which Grieg threw the richness of his strong personality into the task of making the wonders of the peasant music accessible in such avowed "arrangements" as Op. 30, 66, and 72. In these volumes (still strangely little known) we find some of the most inspired examples of his harmonic daring; the more extreme methods of to-day being foreshadowed, again and again, some twenty years ago, with the prophetic quality of true genius.

WELL DILUTED FOLK-MUSIC

As a rule folk-music finds its way to the hearts of the general public and of the less erudite musicians only after it has been "simplified" (generally in the process of notation by well-meaning collectors ignorant of those more ornate subtleties of our notation alone fitted for the task) out of all resemblance to its original self. Nor is this altogether surprising when we come to compare town populations with the country-side or "savage" folk to whom we go for the unwritten material.

## UNCIVILIZED LIVES AROUND IN MUSIC

With regard to music, our modern Western civilization produces, broadly speaking, two main types of educated men. On the one hand the professional musician or leisured amateur-enthusiast who spends the bulk of his waking hours making music, and on the other hand all those many millions of men and women whose lives are far too overworked and arduous, or too completely immersed in the ambitions and labyrinths of our material civilization, to be able to devote any reasonable proportion of their time to music or artistic expression of any kind at all. How different from either of these types is the bulk of uneducated and "uncivilized" humanity of every race and color, with whom natural musical expression may be said to be a universal, highly prized habit that seldom, if ever, degenerates into the drudgery of a mere means of livelihood.

## MENTAL LEISURE AND ART

Mental leisure and ample opportunity for indulging in the natural instinct for untrammelled and uncriticised and untaught artistic self-expression; these are the conditions imperative for the production and continuance of all unwritten music. Now primitive modes of living, however terrible some of them may appear to some educated and refined people, are seldom so barren of "mental leisure" as the bulk of our civilized careers. The old ignorant, unambitious English yokel, for instance, had plenty of opportunities for giving way to his passion for singing. He sang at his work (plough-songs are very general) just as the women folk sang when "waulking" wool. I need hardly mention that "work-songs" of every description form a very considerable part of the music of primitive races the world over.

## LIFE ENCROACHING UPON ART

Not only does the commercial slavery of our civilization hold out to the average man insufficient leisure for the normal growth of the habit of artistic expression (unless he shows talents *exceptional* enough to warrant his becoming a professional artist) but the many decorums of modern society deny to most of us any very generous opportunities for using even our various (unartistic) life-instincts to the full; "sich ausleben" as the Germans so well put it. It is therefore not surprising that with us art frequently becomes the vehicle of expression for accumulated forces, thoughts and desires,

which, under less civilized conditions, more often find their normal outlet in actions. This state of things no doubt in part accounts for the desire of the composers of programme-music to cram their scores with passages reflecting psychological conflicts or depicting Fate or windmills or critics (I am not cavilling at this, for I adore Strauss's Symphonic Poems) and also accounts for the everlasting presence of erotic problems (of which Bernard Shaw has written so deliciously in his Prelude to "Plays for Puritans") in most modern literature.

#### ART ENCROACHING UPON LIFE

In short, with us moderns life is apt to encroach upon art, whereas with uneducated or primitive folk the reverse seems more often to be the case. Their lives, their speech, their manners, even their clothes all show the indelible impress of a superabundance of artistic impulses and interests. A modern Scandinavian has said of the old Norsemen: "They were always ready to throw away their lives for a witty saying"; and much the same literary attitude towards every-day speech may be observed in the queer old illiterate cronies from whom we get the English peasant songs or sea chanties. They show little or no keenness about money or desire to "better" themselves, but they love to be "wags," and crowd every moment of the day with quaint and humorous sayings and antics. When finishing a song they will add: "No harm done," or some equally abstract remark. One of the best folk-singers I ever knew, who had had the varied career of ship's cook, brick-maker and coal merchant, won a prize ("a fine silver pencil") for dancing at the age of 54, performing to the playing of his brother, who was a "left-handed fiddler," i. e., bowed with his left hand, and fingered with his right. There is a ballad called 'Bold William Taylor' found all over Great Britain that tells how Sally Gray, abandoned by her faithless lover, William Taylor, dons "man's apparel" and follows him to the wars, where she is informed that "he's got married to an Irish lady," whereupon the two concluding verses run:

And then she called for a brace of pistols,  
A brace of pistols at her command;  
And there she shot bold William Taylor  
With his bride at his right hand.

And then the Captain was well pleased,  
Was well pleased what she had done;  
And then he made her a great commander  
Aboard of a ship, over all his men.

One of the best songsters I ever met, whose name happened to be Joseph Taylor (of Saxby-All-Saints, Lincolnshire) had picked up this ditty on a short absence from home when a young man. On his return he found his mother in bed and her new-born baby beside her. "What shall we call him?" he was asked, and being just then full of the newest addition to his repertoire of "ballets" (as they are called by the rural singers) he replied: "Christen him Bold William Taylor," and his advice was followed. I wonder how many babies of the educated classes have been named after a song?

H. G. Wells, the novelist, who was with me during a "folk-song hunt" in Gloucestershire, on noticing that I noted down not merely the music and dialect details of the songs, but also many characteristic scraps of banter that passed between the old agriculturalists around us, once said to me: "You are trying to do a more difficult thing than record folk-songs; you are trying to record life"; and I remember the whimsical, almost wistful, look which accompanied the remark.

But I felt then, as I feel now, that it was the superabundance of art in these men's lives, rather than any superabundance of life in their art, that made me so anxious to preserve their old saws and note their littlest habits; for I realized that the every-day events of their lives appealed to these dirty and magnificently ignorant rustics chiefly in so far as they offered them opportunities for displaying the abstract qualities of their inner natures (indeed, they showed comparatively small interest in the actual material results involved), and that their placid comments upon men and things so often preferred to adopt the unpassionate *formal* and *patterned* habits of "art" (so familiar to us in rural proverbs) rather than resemble the more passionate unordered behavior of inartistic "life."

#### PERSONAL OWNERSHIP OF SONGS

I need hardly say that natural artists of this order sing or play without self-consciousness of any kind, and anything resembling "stage-fright" seems unknown to them. When such a one refuses to let himself be heard, it is, more often than not, because he regards his tunes as purely *personal property*, and does not wish to part with them to others any more than he would with his pipe or his hat. I recall the case of a rustic singer, who, in his anxiety to acquire a song from a fellow-folksinger of this sort, had to hide himself in a cupboard in order to learn it, as its owner would never

have consented to sing it if he had dreamt his performance were being listened to by a rival; and I have myself had to get under a bed in order to note down the singing of an old woman equally chary of passing on her accomplishments to any "Tom, Dick or Harry."

This feeling of personal ownership of songs is still more strongly shown by many primitive non-European races, notably by the North American Indians. That inspired and inspiring collector of their music and devoted champion of their cause, Miss Natalie Curtis, wrote in an article, "The Perpetuating of Indian Art," in the "Outlook" of November 22, 1913: "Some songs are owned by families, even by individuals, and so highly do the Indians hold them that a man in dying may bequeath his own personal song to another, even as we bestow tangible possessions." Striking individual instances of this attitude on the part of the Indians will be found in the same author's touching and impressive tribute to aboriginal American life and art, "The Indians' Book" (Harper & Bros., New York).

THE IMPRESS OF PERSONALITY: UNWRITTEN MUSIC  
IS NOT STANDARDIZED

The primitive musician unhesitatingly alters the traditional material he has inherited from thousands of unknown talents and geniuses before him to suit his own voice or instruments, or to make it conform to his purely personal taste for rhythm and general style. There is no written original to confront him with, no universally accepted standard to criticize him by. He is at once an executive and creative artist, for he not only remoulds old ditties, but also weaves together fresh combinations of more or less familiar phrases, which he calls "making new songs." His product is local and does not have to bear comparison with similar efforts imported from elsewhere.

I once let an old Lincolnshire man (a perfect artist in his way) hear in my phonograph a variant of one of the songs he had sung to me as sung by another equally splendid folk-singer, and asked him if he didn't think it fine. His answer was typical: "I don't know about it's being fine or not; I only know it's *wrong*." To each singer his own versions of songs are the only correct ones.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the extent to which such traditional singers embellish so-called "simple melodies" with a regular riot of individualistic excrescences and idiosyncrasies of every kind, each detail of which, in the case of the most gifted

songsters at any rate, is a precious manifestation of real artistic personality; so much so that a skilled notator will often have to repeat a phonographic record of such a performance some hundreds of times before he will have succeeded in extracting from it a representative picture on paper of its baffling, profuse characteristics.

#### WHAT SEEMS VOCAL TO FOLK-SINGERS

Many of these singers retain the ringing freshness of their voices until such advanced ages as seventy years and over, when they still enjoy a command of certain phases of vocal technique which even our greatest art-singers might try (as they certainly will not do) in vain to imitate, notably an enormous range of staccato and pianissimo effects. They seldom aim at attempting anything resembling a genuine legato style, but use their breath, more as do some birds and animals, in short stabs and gushes of quickly contrasted, twittering, pattering and coughing sounds which (to my ears, at least) are as beautiful as they are amusing. Somewhat similar non-legato tendencies may be noted in the fiddling of British and Scandinavian peasants, who are as fond of twiddles and quirks as are the old singers, and do not try to exchange the "up and down" physical nature of the bow for the attainment of a continuous tone.

#### THE COMPLEXITY OF FOLK MUSIC

Returning to the folk-singers: rhythmical irregularities of every kind are everywhere in evidence, and the folk-scales in which their so-called "modal" melodies move are not finally fixed as are our art-scales, but abound with quickly alternating major and minor thirds, sharp and flat sevenths, and (more rarely) major and minor sixths, and whereas the sixth of the scale occurs usually merely as a passing note all the other intervals are attacked freely, either jumping from one to the other, or as initial notes in phrases.

At least, this is my experience after an exhaustive examination of my collection of close on 400 phonograph records of such tunes. Some singers evinced a rooted objection to singing more notes than syllables, and to avoid this add "nonsense syllables" to and in between their words (according to a definite system that seems to obtain throughout Great Britain) rather than "slur" two or more notes, occasioning such sentences as: "For to cree-oose (cruise) id-den (in) the chad-der-niddel (channel) of old Eng-gerland's (England's) fame." The following scrap from one of the



Even when natives have been exposed to the influence of European music long enough to have acquired from it the habit of singing in parts, sometimes the unmistakable characteristics of unwritten music will survive to a surprising extent and color all their harmonic habits. This has been brought home to me very forcibly by five phonograph records of the improvised part-singing of Polynesian natives from Rarotonga in the South Seas, which have come into my possession through the warm generosity of a very remarkable collector, Mr. A. J. Knocks, of Otaki, North Island, New Zealand.

## DESCRIPTION OF RAROTONGAN PART-SINGING

These choral songs, which were sung as thank-offerings by the Rarotongans in return for gifts they received from the Maoris of Otaki, are more full of the joy of life than any other music (art or native) it has yet been my good fortune to hear, though they also abound in touching and wistful elements. The polyphony displayed by the four to eight singers was prodigious, and as the whole thing went prestissimo (Polynesian languages lend themselves very readily to speed) it reminded me of nothing so much as of a seething, squirming musical ant-hill, bursting into furious song for sheer joy and high spirits. No doubt the habit of harmony here displayed had been caught long ago from missionary hymns (Rarotonga was "converted" before many of the other islands of the South Seas), yet the use made by these brilliant musicians of their foreign accomplishment was completely native in its application and was throughout governed by the individualistic dictates of Unwritten Music. Their procedure followed habits rather than laws.

Each part-song consisted of a succession of small sections, each lasting some fifteen to twenty seconds, and separated one from the other by a brief moment of silence.

A short solo began each section, consisting of a curving, descending phrase, starting off on the fourth, fifth or sixth of the diatonic major scale and ending on the tonic below. As soon as the first singer reached the keynote the other voices would chime in, one after the other or in a bunch, according to the free choice of each individual concerned, while the first singer kept up a stirring hammering and highly rhythmic patter (which in the phonograph closely resembles the twang of banjos or rattle of small drums, though actually no instruments at all were used) on the tonic until the end of the section.

These other voices also sang curving, descending diatonic phrases (never twice quite alike, but always bearing a sort of family likeness to those of the first singer), which were repeated by each singer several times before the end of the section, which was heralded by a growing lassitude in all the voices—often fading away in an indolent sort of "dying duck" wail—whereas each new section was attacked in the most vigorous manner.

The various melodic lines as well as the whole character of the performance showed great variety during the course of a longish chain of such sections, while the harmonic and polyphonic happenings were kaleidoscopic in their everchanging aspects.

It will be seen that a great range of personal choice was left to all the members of this Rarotongan choir, in each of whom a highly complex, delicate and critical sense for ensemble was imperative. Each of these natives had to be a kind of improvising communal composer, and to a far greater degree simultaneously creative and executive than is the case with peasant songsters in Great Britain or Scandinavia, though a somewhat similar gift for complex improvised part-singing is displayed in the wonderful Russian choral folk-music so admirably collected and noted by Madame Lineff.

#### THE LACK OF HARMONIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Attractive as are the passionate warmth of vocal color, the savage exhilarating rattle of the rhythms, and the often almost wistful sweetness of the melodic phrases heard in this Rarotongan music, most fascinating of all to a modern composer are the Bach-like gems of everchanging, euphoniously discordant polyphonic harmony which throughout surprise, baffle and soothe the ear; patches of concords alternating with whole successions of discords—mainly seconds.

To us moderns the results of this free polyphony makes a seductive *complex harmonic appeal*, but I doubt very much if the Rarotongans themselves hear their own music in this way, and I am more inclined to believe that they attain their unique results precisely because their exceptionally developed individualistic polyphonic instincts are still free from the kind of harmonic consciousness which art-musicians have gradually built up through the centuries.

#### QUARTER TONES AND INEXACT UNISON

It is, of course, widely known that many races use quarter-tones and other divisions of the scale smaller than those hitherto in vogue in Europe, and Ferruccio Busoni's illuminating pamphlet "A New Esthetic of Music" contains some very clear-sighted suggestions for the use of third-tones and other close intervals—suggestions which I fondly hope the near future may see carried into practice.

My own experience with such small intervals has been in the "waiatas" and chants of the Maoris of New Zealand. Here all sorts of very close intervals are used in an indefinite, gliding sort of singing, which is very effective; but it is not my impression that these intervals are fixed as are those of our art-scales. When

several Maoris sing such chants together, great variations of intervals occur in the different voices, constituting a kind of "careless" or "inexact" unison also noticeable in Egyptian singing and pipe-playing and in much Eastern music, which has a charm all its own and might with great advantage be used in our art-music. In this sort of ensemble the musicians do not seem to make any attempt to attain an exact unison, and here also one is inclined to imagine that the ear of the native listener follows the path of each performer separately, and is not conscious of the discords that result from this "loose fit" in a harmonical or "horizontal" way, as we would be.

#### MUSICAL "TREASURE ISLANDS" IN THE PACIFIC AND THE RICHNESS OF AFRICAN RHYTHMS

The South Sea Islands must simply teem with complex improvised choral music, which, according to R. L. Stevenson, Pierre Loti, and many other sojourners in the "Gentle Isles," accompanies both their ceremonies and their most ordinary actions, and makes their every-day existence constantly melodious.

Africa appears to be the home of the richest developments of what may be termed "rhythmic polyphony," in which players upon every variety of drums and percussion instruments display in their treatment of intricately contrasted and independent rhythms a gift for communal improvisation comparable with that of Polynesian singers. Mr. H. E. Krehbiel, in his valuable and engrossing book on "Afro-American Folksongs," says of the war-dances of the Dahomans (pp. 64, 65):

Berlioz in his supremest effort with his army of drummers produced nothing to compare in artistic interest with the harmonious drumming of these savages.

Mr. Krehbiel's description of their music is exciting to a degree, and should be consulted in its entirety.

#### THE ELECTRIFYING "CLEF CLUB OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK"

A distant echo of the habits of unwritten music can be traced in the marvelous accomplishments of the colored instrumentalists and singers who make up the New York "Clef Club," an organization which could not fail to electrify Europe if presented

there, and to hear which it is more than worth one's while to travel across the Atlantic. The compositions they interpret are art-music, and reveal the strict harmonic habits of the written art, but the ease with which those members of the Club who cannot read musical notation learn and remember intricate band and choral parts by heart (often singing tenor and playing bass) and many individualistic and rhapsodical traits in their performances suggest the presence of instincts inherited from the days of communal improvisation. These qualities are nowhere more in evidence than in their exhilarating renderings of two fascinating choral numbers by that strangely gifted American composer, Will Marion Cook—"Rain-song" and "Exhortation"—in themselves works of real genius and originality that deserve a worldwide reputation.

Musicians who have been thrilled by the passionate but always artistically refined percussion playing of the "Clef Club" can the more easily picture to themselves the overwhelming effect of the Dahoman drumming described by Mr. Krehbiel.

#### THE POSSIBILITIES OF MASSED DECLAMATION

The war-dances of the Maoris of New Zealand strike a certain note of savage, elemental force and passion which, it seems to me, is foreign to most European music with the exception of certain heroic and violent outbursts in Beethoven. These "hakas," as they are called, consist solely of spoken declamations of highly rhythmic poems for solo and chorus, accompanied by handclapping, weird quiverings of the body and threatening gestures and grimaces.

It is hard to realize that such simple means as these can be responsible for an impression so *musically* pregnant and emotionally overwhelming as that produced by these graceful ex-cannibals.

#### SOME OF THE LESSONS OF UNWRITTEN MUSIC

What life is to the writer, and nature to the painter, unwritten music is to many a composer: a kind of mirror of genuineness and naturalness. Through it alone can we come to know something of the incalculable variety of man's instincts for musical expression. From it alone can we glean some insight into what suggests itself as being "vocal" to natural singers whose technique has never been exposed to the influence of arbitrary "methods." In the reiterated physical actions of marching, rowing, reaping, dancing, cradle-rocking, etc., that called its work-songs, dance-music, ballads and

lullabies into life, we see before our very eyes the origin of the regular rhythms of our art-music and of poetic meters, and are also able to note how quickly these once so rigid rhythms give place to rich and wayward irregularities of every kind as soon as these bodily movements and gestures are abandoned and the music which originally existed but as an accompaniment to them continues independently as art for art's sake. In such examples as the Polynesian part-songs we can trace the early promptings of polyphony and the habits of concerted improvisation to their very source, and, since all composing is little else than "frozen inspiration," surely this latter experience is of supreme importance; the more so, if there again should dawn an age in which the bulk of civilized men and women will come to again possess sufficient mental leisure in their lives to enable them to devote themselves to artistic pleasures on so large a scale as do the members of uncivilized communities.

Then the spectacle of one composer producing music for thousands of musical drones (totally uncreative themselves, and hence comparatively out of touch with the whole phenomenon of artistic creation) will no longer seem normal or desirable, and then the present gulf between the mentality of composers and performers will be bridged.

#### THE TYRANNY OF THE COMPOSER

The fact that art-music has been written down instead of improvised has divided musical creators and executants into two quite separate classes; the former autocratic and the latter comparatively slavish. It has grown to be an important part of the office of the modern composer to leave as few loopholes as possible in his works for the idiosyncrasies of the performer. The considerable increase of exactness in our modes of notation and tempo and expression marks has all been directed toward this end, and though the state of things obtaining among trained musicians for several centuries has been productive of isolated geniuses of an exceptional greatness unthinkable under primitive conditions, it seems to me that it has done so at the expense of the artistry of millions of performers, and to the destruction of natural sympathy and understanding between them and the creative giants.

#### THE PRICE OF HARMONY

Perhaps it would not be amiss to examine the possible reason for the ancient tendency of cultured musicians gradually to discontinue

improvisation, and seek some explanation for the lack of variety with regard to scales, rhythms and dynamics displayed by our Western art-music when compared with the resources of more primitive men in these directions. I believe the birth of harmony in Europe to have been accountable for much; and truly, the acquisition of this most transcendental and soul-reaching of all our means of musical expression has been worth *any* and *every* sacrifice. We know how few combinations of intervals sounded euphonious to the pioneers of harmonic consciousness, and can imagine what concentration they must have brought to bear upon accuracies of notation and reliability of matters of pitch in ensemble; possibly to the exclusion of any very vital interest in individualistic traits in performance or in the more subtle possibilities of dynamics, color and irregular rhythms.

#### THE POSSIBILITIES OF "PURE LINE"

With the gradual growth of the all-engrossing chord-sense the power of deep emotional expression through the medium of an unaccompanied single melodic line would likewise tend to atrophy; which perhaps explains why many of those conversant with the strictly solo performances of some branches of unwritten music miss in the melodic invention of the greatest classical geniuses—passionately as they may adore their masterliness in other directions—the presence of a certain satisfying completeness (from the standpoint of pure line) that may often be noticed in the humblest folk-song.

It always seems to me strange that modern composers, with the example of Bach's Chaconne and Violin and 'Cello Sonatas as well as of much primitive music before them, do not more often feel tempted to express themselves extensively in single line or unison without harmonic accompaniment of any kind. I have found this a particularly delightful and inspiring medium to work in, and very refreshing after much preoccupation with richly polyphonic styles. Now that we have grown so skilful in our treatment of harmony that this side of our art often tends to outweigh all our other creative accomplishments, some of us feel the need of replenishing our somewhat impoverished resources of melody, rhythm and color, and accordingly turn, and seldom in vain, for inspiration and guidance to those untutored branches of our art that have never ceased to place their chief reliance in these elements. I have already referred to the possibilities of "inexact

unison" evinced by Maori and Egyptian music. Similar rich and varied lessons might be learned from Red Indian, East Indian, Javanese, Burmese, and many other Far Eastern musics.

#### OUR SPROUTING POWERS OF APPRECIATION

Being, moreover, the fortunate heirs to the results of those centuries of harmonic experiment in which ever more and more discordant combinations of intervals came to be regarded as concordant, we are now at last in a position from which we can approach such music as the Rarotongan part-songs and similar music of a highly complex discordant nature with that broad-minded toleration and enthusiastic appreciation which our painters and writers brought to bear on the arts of non-Europeans so many generations before our musicians could boast of an equally humble, cultured and detached attitude.

#### THE MODERN TENDENCY TO TAKE "HINTS"

Out in nature, however, men have long known how to enjoy discordant combinations. A telegraph wire humming B flat, a bird piping a flat B natural and factory whistles chiming in with notes resembling D and F sharp; the mournful appeal of such accidental ensembles has frequently awakened emotional response. But a musician in 1890 would have been inclined to enjoy such sounds as merely part of "nature" and with no bearing upon his "art," whereas we to-day are more apt to find compositional hints in such occurrences; not, I most sincerely hope, because we have any desire to "copy nature," or because we could willingly contemplate exchanging, for however brief a moment, the precise choice and formal arrangement of artistic procedure for the choicelessness of "life," but simply because a greater number of discordant harmonic combinations happen to charm our ears to-day than they did in 1890.

Probably Beethoven was one of the first of the "moderns" to find such suggestions in every-day sounds. The trumpet behind the stage in the third "Leonora" seems an instance of this, while the premature entry of the horn in the first movement of the "Eroica" and the belated notes of the bassoon in the Scherzo of the "Pastoral" show his generous readiness to perpetuate in his scores hints derived from the mistakes of the rehearsal room and the happy-go-lucky ensemble of tavern "Musikanten."



excerpt from "Random Round" by Perry Grainger

Handwritten musical score for "Random Round" by Percy Grainger. The score is written on ten staves, organized into two systems of five staves each. The instruments and parts are labeled as follows:

- System 1 (Top five staves):**
  - Staff 1: *Grand* (Grand Piano)
  - Staff 2: *Resonaphone*
  - Staff 3: *Mandolins*
  - Staff 4: *Violins*
  - Staff 5: *Viola*
- System 2 (Bottom five staves):**
  - Staff 6: *Cello*
  - Staff 7: *Voices*
  - Staff 8: *Tenor*
  - Staff 9: *Mandola*
  - Staff 10: *Guitars*
- Additional parts:**
  - Piano* (written below the Guitars staff)
  - Guitar* (written below the Piano staff)

The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The piece is in 3/4 time, as indicated by the time signature on the first staff. The notation is dense and complex, characteristic of Grainger's style.

### HARMONIC EMANCIPATIONS

Nowadays we not only hear whole sequences of what would formerly have been considered impossibly harsh discords with rare delight, especially when they are as poetically treated and as delicately scored as they are in Schönberg's "Five orchestral pieces," but we are able to listen to two pianists simultaneously improvising passages of chords in different keys on two pianos, each quite independently of the other and to enjoy the crossing paths of these chord-groups in much the same way as we appreciate the intertwining of single parts in older music. Here is an instance of such freely moving chord-groups: (*See facsimile.*)

Two entrancing examples of this pleasure in "double-chording" may be studied in Ravel's "Le Gibet" (in which passages in A major and modulations bristling with G sharps, A naturals, B naturals and C naturals pass over and under and through a continuous bell-like organ-point on B flat [A sharp] in the middle of the keyboard which is heard chiming from the beginning to the end of this pianistic gem) and in that famous passage in Strauss's "Rosenkavalier" which accompanies the entry of the silver rose and occurs again at the close of the final duet, in which strings and voices sustain the tonic and major third while a slow cascade of foreign and remote chords of every degree of concordance and discordance are given out by flutes, harp and celesta; constituting, to my mind, a stroke of the highest genius and accounting for one of the tenderest and most touching effects ever conceived.

### THE "WRONG NOTE CRAZE" SUCCEEDS THE "RIGHT NOTE CRAZE"

Modern geniuses and primitive music unite in teaching us the charm of "wrong notes that sound right." Indeed, Frederick Delius has aptly referred to the wave of discord that is at present sweeping over the world of civilized music as "the wrong note craze." The innovations of such pioneers as Debussy, Ravel, Strauss, Schönberg, Stravinsky, Cyril Scott and Ornstein open up the possibility of modern musicians being capable of combining the communal improvisation of South Sea Islanders with the harmonic consciousness of our written art-music.

### AN EXPERIMENT IN CONCERTED PARTIAL IMPROVISATION

Realizing this, I set out, some three years ago, to embody some of the experience I had gleaned from familiarity with the

primitive polyphony of the Rarotongan part-songs in a composition entitled "Random Round," which was planned for a few voices, guitars and mandolins, to which could be added (if available) mandola, piano, xylophone, celesta, glockenspiel, resonaphone or marimbaphone, strings and wind instruments. It consisted of sections (A, B, C, etc.), each of which was again divided into as many as 10 to 20 variants (A1, A2, etc.), some quiet, some noisy, some simple, some complex; each bar of each variant being composed in such a manner that it would form some sort of a harmonic whole when performed together with any bar of any or all of the other variants of the same section.

The guitars formed the background for all the rest, and as soon as they got going with section A any or all of the other players and singers could fall in, when and how they pleased, with any of their variants of section A, provided their beats corresponded to those of the guitars. For instance, one voice might be heard singing the second measure of its A3 while another voice was engaged on the seventh measure of its A9. Before section B was to begin, a Javanese gong would be beaten, whereupon the same sort of canonical intermingling of the different variants of B would be undertaken that had just occurred with the A variants; and so on with C, D, etc., to the end.

It will be seen that a fairly large range of personal choice was allowed to every one taking part, and that the effectiveness of the whole thing would depend primarily on the natural sense for contrasts of form, color and dynamics displayed by the various performers, and their judgment in entering and leaving the general ensemble at suitable moments.

Thus one player, by intruding carelessly and noisily at a moment when all the rest were playing softly, would wreck that particular effect, though, on the other hand, such an act, if undertaken intentionally in order to provide dynamic variety, might be very welcome. Last summer in London some fifteen of us experimented with this "Random Round," and the results obtained were very instructive to me personally. Several of those taking part quickly developed the power of merging themselves into the artistic whole, and whereas at the outset the monotonous babel produced somewhat "resembled a day at the Dog's Home, Battersea" (as a leading critic once described Albeniz' marvelous and touching piano piece "Jerez" when I first introduced it to London audiences some years ago), after a little practice together the whole thing took on form, color and clarity, and sounded harmonious enough, though a frequent swash of passing discords was

Excerpt from a March for Piano and Orchestra by Percy Grainger

This is a handwritten musical score for a march by Percy Grainger. The score is written on ten staves, organized into three systems. The first system includes staves for 'Wool-wind' (flute/piccolo), 'Pianoforte' (piano), and 'Trumpets'. The second system includes staves for '4 Horns' and 'Trombones'. The third system includes staves for 'Strings' and 'Cresc.' (crescendo). The music is in 2/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is highly detailed, with many accidentals and dynamic markings such as 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The score is written in a fluid, handwritten style, characteristic of a composer's draft.

noticeable also. I look forward to some day presenting to English and American audiences a performance of this blend of modern harmonic tendencies with experiences drawn from the improvised polyphony of primitive music, although, of course, my piece represents only the veriest beginnings of what may ultimately be evolved in the realms of concerted improvisation.

In the meantime I cannot refrain from giving a tiny example of the sort of combinations that resulted from the individualistic use on the part of the various performers of the somewhat elastic material I had provided them with, remarking, however, that the effect of the actual performance was far warmer and less harsh than it appears on paper, largely owing to the transparent quality of the plucked sounds of the guitars, mandolins and mandolas, and the illusive and "non-adhesive" tone of the brighter percussion instruments. (*See facsimile.*)

PRIMITIVE MUSIC IS A CLOSED BOOK  
TO MOST MUSICIANS

When we consider how meagre the generally available records of unwritten music are, it is surprising that it should have already exerted so noticeable an influence upon contemporaneous composers.

Experience of primitive music is not in any way thrust upon the budding musician. When I was a boy in Frankfort my teacher wanted me to enter for (I think it was) the Mendelssohn Prize for piano playing, and I remember asking him: "If I should win, would they let me study Chinese music in China with the money?" And his reply: "No, they don't give prizes to idiots." No doubt many a young musician is feeling to-day what I felt then—a longing to escape from the inefficiencies of theoretic teaching and to know something about the myriad musics of the various races, and to be able to track some of the creative impulses to their sources. But he will not find much exhaustive material accessible. For instance, though it may be already widely appreciated how much such delicious pieces as Debussy's "Pagodes" and "Refflets dans l'eau" (and indeed, the whole modern French school) owe to some acquaintance with Javanese music yet we still have to journey to the Dutch Indies if we wish to hear the "gamelan."

LET ALL THE WORLD HEAR  
ALL THE WORLD'S MUSIC

But I believe the time will soon be ripe for the formation of a world-wide International Musical Society for the purpose of making

all the world's music known to all the world by means of imported performances, phonograph and gramophone records and adequate notations. Quite small but representative troupes of peasant and native musicians, dancers, etc., could be set in motion on "world tours" to perform in the subscription concerts of such a society in the art-centres of all lands. One program might consist of Norwegian fiddling, pipe-playing, cattle-calls, peasant dances and ballad singing, another of various types of African drumming, marimba and zanze playing, choral songs and war dances, and yet another evening filled out with the teeming varieties of modes of singing and playing upon plucked string instruments indigenous to British India; and so on, until music-lovers everywhere could form some accurate conception of the as yet but dimly guessed multitudinous beauties of the world's contemporaneous total output of music.

#### OUR DEBT TO THE PAST AND

#### OUR DUTY TO THE FUTURE

Quite apart from the pleasure and veneration such exotic arts inspire purely for their own sake, those of us who are genuinely convinced that many of the greatest modern composers (by no means all, however—not Schönberg or Strauss or Fauré, for instance) owe much to their contact with one kind or other of unwritten music, must, if we wish to behave with any generosity toward the future, face the fact that coming generations will not enjoy a first-hand experience of primitive music such as those amongst us can still obtain who are gifted with means, leisure, or fighting enthusiasm. Let us therefore not neglect to provide composers and students to come with the best *second-hand* material we can. Fortunes might be spent, and well spent, in having good gramophone and phonograph records taken of music from everywhere, and in having the contents of these records noted down by brilliant yet painstaking musicians; men capable of responding to unexpected novelties and eager to seize upon and preserve *in their full strangeness and otherness* just those elements that have least in common with our own music. We see on all hands the victorious on-march of our ruthless Western civilization (so destructively intolerant in its colonial phase) and the distressing spectacle of the gentle but complex native arts wilting before its irresistible simplicity.

Everywhere men and women whose forebears were untaught individualistic musicians are inevitably finding their own expression

(or not finding any at all) along the more precise and sometimes narrow paths of the written art. Soon, or comparatively soon, folk-music on Southern plantations, or in Scandinavia, Great Britain, Russia and Spain will be as dead as it already is in Holland and Germany, and many native races will have exchanged their song-lit "savage" modes of living for the (musically speaking) comparatively silent early stages of "commercial prosperity" or commercial want. Against that day—which, however, we may confidently expect to find compensatingly more gloriously rich in art-music than any previous age—let us make noble efforts to preserve, for the affectionate gaze of future eclectics, above all adequate printed records of what now still remains of a phase of music which, in the nature of things, can never be reborn again, and which comes down to us so fragrant with the sweet impress of the personality of many millions of unknown departed artists, men and women.